

# 1690 So. Washington: More Warehouses?

## March Update: It's Worse Than We Knew

**THE ISSUE:** A politically-connected developer, Jack Morris, is asking the Piscataway Zoning Board to re-zone one of the last wooded parcels in town from rural/residential to commercial zoning, to accommodate two trucking warehouse complexes on the 24.5 acre site. The final vote has been scheduled for **Thursday, March 25, 2021**.

### NO DEP WAIVER HAS BEEN GRANTED!

This development would pave over valuable **freshwater wetlands** and pre-empt low-density land use. The NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) Division of Land Resource Protection is now reviewing the application for a wetlands waiver. The DEP Division of Environmental Justice will review the **environmental justice** impacts of adding yet another diesel trucking warehouse complex to this area, although the EJ law is not yet in full effect. Piscataway already has an air quality crisis and has added 1,000 new truck bays in the past six years.

**WE OBJECT!** This warehouse development directly threatens neighboring properties with increased **pollution and congestion**:



- A. **The Randolphville Elementary School** is on the west side of the tract, serving nearly 500 K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade students and 45 teachers and staff. The school is already bordered by three new warehouses built 2015-2019, a warehouse under

construction in 2021, and a beverage distribution center--for a total of 186 diesel truck bays! The Piscataway Township Education Assn (PTEA) has voted to oppose the re-zoning for these two warehouses. Some Board of Education members are raising deep concerns.

**B. The Lake Nelson neighborhood** lies to the south of the tract, off South Washington Ave. Since So. Washington doesn't have direct access to I-287 South, trucks would be using local roads to reach other entrances, increasing emissions, noise, congestion and eroding property values. The Ambrose Valley neighborhood by the Randolphville School will also be subject to more compromised air quality.

**C. The long-promised "Ecological Park"** lies directly across South Washington. Mayor Wahler and the Council took over the Halper Farm in 2006, pledging to turn the 75-acre tract into a public open space, an Ecological Park. If that ever happens, it will be surrounded by commercial development and diesel trucking.

**WE PROPOSE: Expand the Ecological Park!** The Zoning Board does have to approve the waiver requested by M&M Realty (Jack Morris) to re-zone 1690 So. Washington for warehouse construction. If the Zoning Board keeps the present zoning in place, it would preserve the balance of commercial, residential and rural land use intended by the original zoning designations. Keeping the present zoning also opens the opportunity for the Township to purchase this parcel at a future date, at reasonable price for "rural/residential" property (in the \$1 million ballpark).

The town could also consider buying out the adjoining wooded lots and expand the promised Ecological Park across the street into an impressive open space in the core of town. There might not be windfall profits for developers, but a good return for the original owners. AND we could create a priceless asset and attraction for township residents and businesses, along with an ecological buffer for air quality, stormwater runoff, and wetlands preservation. Birds and all. That's called smart development... and good stewardship of our rapidly vanishing open spaces.

## ***THE REAL STORY***

**INSIDER POLITICS:** The 1690 So. Washington proposal has been put forward by M & M Realty, a shell subsidiary of the giant developer, Edgewood Properties. Its CEO Jack Morris is a long-time big donor to the Middlesex County Democratic Organization, going all the way back to disgraced felon John Lynch, his business partner. Morris' cronies in the current MCDO machine include State Sen. Bob Smith (a former P'way mayor and local land use attorney!), former P'way Mayor Ted Light, Mayor Brian Wahler and our seven town council members.

The **Zoning Board** members who will rule on Morris' proposal have been hand-picked by Mayor Wahler. The Chair is Shawn Cahill, a county employee and husband of Council member Gabrielle Cahill (who also sits on the Planning Board). The Vice-Chair is Warren Zimmerman, neighbor of the Cahills and Council member Steve Cahn, who is

also connected through his tenure on the NJ State Theater Board. The other five men on the Zoning Board include three MCDO committee members and two fire commissioners. It's the "buddy system" once again controlling Piscataway's future.

And if the Zoning Board and Mayor Wahler can push this development through, will we be seeing low assessments and a sweetheart PILOT deal (payment in lieu of taxes) to defray the cost tax penalties for converting farmland? The other new warehouses have outrageously low assessments and PILOT deals, which exempt them from paying school taxes.

Maybe you want to complain to the Town Council member for Ward 2, Jim Bullard? Good luck: Jim has never voted against the Mayor's agenda in his three terms on the Council, nor has any other Council member. You could ask our town's Public Health Dept. or the Environmental Commission what's going on, but we don't have either. Try the Health Advisory Commission, which never meets. Why not go directly to the MCDO, since they're the power brokers here? Well, your MCDO rep for Ward 2 District 2, is Paulette Crabiel Wahler, the mayor's wife. Should this clique of lifetime politicians be able to sell off and sell out the future of our town?

**VS. THE PUBLIC INTEREST:** We are hopeful that the DEP will rule to preserve our invaluable wetlands and also hold environmental justice hearings for the impacted community around the Randolphville School. But the fight doesn't stop there. We residents need to stand up for our rights to clean air and our children's right to healthy schools.

Piscataway is an overburdened community, where people of color are now three-quarters of all residents, facing the highest risks from this toxic development strategy. We already earn an "F" rating from the American Lung Association. Developing yet another truck depot threatens to add a new load of particulate pollution to our poor air quality and our health costs. It threatens our future home values and our tax base.

These same truck depots have paved over wetland areas, permeable soil and wooded lots, which act as valuable protection from stormwater surges and run-off from super storms, like Hurricane Sandy. Let's plan before we pave every open lot in town!

**Why place the hidden costs of warehouse development on residents and future generations? Certainly not to satisfy a real estate mogul and notorious donor to political slush funds!**

See our letter to *Tapinto* on 3-23-21: **LET PWAY KIDS BREATHE**

<https://www.tapinto.net/towns/piscataway/categories/letters-to-the-editor/articles/let-pway-kids-breathe>

**Join HUNDREDS of residents in our petition campaign to the  
Piscataway Township Zoning Board:**

**<http://tinyurl.com/letpwaykidsbreathe>**

**STOP the 1690 SOUTH WASHINGTON WAREHOUSES!**  
**DEFEND OPEN SPACE, DEMAND SMART DEVELOPMENT!**